MSU HISTORY PRESENTS

JENNIFER EAGLIN

Going Nuclear: Nuclear Energy and Diversifying Brazilian Energy Infrastructure during the Military Dictatorship

Today, Brazil relies on nuclear energy for 3 per cent of its energy needs while hydroelectricity accounts for over 60 per cent. However, Brazilian officials sought to aggressively incorporate nuclear energy into the country's energy infrastructure at any cost in the second half of the twentieth century. Brazil first sought entry into the small club of countries that controlled the technology of their own nuclear plants in the 1950s, but its first commercial nuclear energy plant only came online in 1985 with extensive international assistance despite efforts to obtain nuclear energy autonomy. Most studies of Brazil's nuclear history focus on the political implications of Brazil's quest to establish a domestic nuclear energy industry. However, Jennifer Eaglin will introduce Brazilian nuclear energy history from an environmental perspective. She argues that Brazil's abundant natural resources were critical to legitimizing the controversial establishment of the industry but also undermined the country's nuclear energy ambitions in the debates about the industry's place in the country's energy infrastructure. Through an examination of Brazilian dependence on water to advance their nuclear ambitions, Eaglin questions the foundations of Brazilian energy diversification efforts of the era and connections to energy strategies today.

Jennifer Eaglin (Ohio State) joins the department to discuss her current work on the Brazilian nuclear energy industry. Her research focuses on the history of alternative energy development in Brazil. Eaglin's first book, Sweet Fuel: A Political and Environmental History of Brazilian Ethanol (Oxford University Press, 2022), explores the history of Brazilian sugar-based ethanol development from the 1930s to the 2000s and the associated environmental and social costs that accompanied the industry's growth. She is currently a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where she is working on her next book project on the Brazilian nuclear energy industry.

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